



CITY COUNCIL

Public Works Committee

Monday, June 20, 2011
Meeting Report

Committee Members Attending: S. Marmarou, D. Sterner, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz Chair

Others Attending: S. Katzenmoyer, F. Denbowski, O. Smith, C. Geffken, D. Hoag

The Public Works Committee meeting was called to order at 5:06 pm.

Peace Sign Restoration

Mr. Denbowski stated that several people involved with the project were to attend. He stated that they met with the Mayor who referred the issue to the Public Works Committee. There is interest in restoring the peace sign but there are practicality issues.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that the Committee continue through the agenda items until the individuals arrive at the meeting.

Egelman's Park

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she requested this topic be placed on the agenda. She stated that there has been interest from another municipality in acquiring this park but in the meantime the gates remain open allowing vehicular access 24 hours a day. She stated that this is unsafe and stated that maintenance is not occurring as needed.

Ms. Hoag explained that Public Works does not have the personnel needed to lock and unlock the gates daily. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she knows of neighbors who are willing to take on this responsibility.

Mr. Waltman arrived at this time.

Mr. Marmarou suggested that the district police officer lock and unlock the gates as they should have a key. Mr. Geffken stated that he will follow up with this idea but that the officers may not be able to consistently lock and unlock the gates.

Mr. Marmarou stated that it would be difficult to stop access to this park.

Mr. Geffken expressed his thanks to the neighbors who are willing to assist and stated that he will follow up with Public Works. He also stated that he will be meeting this week with the interested municipality and the County Commissioners about this park.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned when road repairs on Hill Road would begin. Ms. Hoag stated that she received information about the dam on Friday but has not yet had time to thoroughly review it. She stated that repairs are in the design phase. Mr. Geffken stated that all City dams are considered hazardous.

Mr. Waltman stated that the removal of this dam must be examined very carefully.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz expressed her opinion that this dam must remain. She requested that the Izaak Walton League also be consulted regarding this dam.

Mr. Waltman stated that this area of the City should be part of its marketing plan to attract middle class residents.

Mr. Marmarou stressed the need for the City to retain the ball fields which are part of Egelman's Park.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz described the downstream effects of removing the dam at Egelman's.

Buttonwood Gateway Area Update

Mr. Geffken gave a brief background on the issue and reviewed the memo from Mr. Kersley noting the progress made. He stated that Reading Beautification has been very helpful with these efforts and that a review of refuse may determine who is dumping in the area. He stated that NHS has told the City that they would also assist.

Mr. Marmarou noted that this neighborhood has a high rate of resident turnover. He stated that many residents may not know the City's expectations. He suggested that volunteers be located to welcome new residents who would also distribute the Welcome to Reading booklets.

Mr. Waltman stated that the issue of closing the streets be looked at closely and suggested "Local Traffic Only" signs be erected. He also suggested signs indicating that the area is monitored by security cameras. He noted the need to address the railroad as well. Mr. Geffken stated that Mr. Denbowski would be addressing the railroad.

Mr. Denbowski stated that several strong neighbors have been identified through this process and NHS has offered to assist.

Ms. Coats from NHS stated that there are residents who are willing to mow properties on Gordon St and help with keeping Barbey playground clean. She stated that they are also interested in maintaining the mural lot for children.

Mr. Waltman stated that many residents assisted with the clean ups held in the area and added that three dumpsters were filled.

Ms. Coats stated that NHS would be willing to welcome new residents and distribute the Welcome to Reading booklets.

Mr. Sterner questioned the neighborhood's ability to form a community group. Ms. Coats stated that NHS will be assisting the neighbors to form a community group.

Mr. Marmarou stated that 6th & Amity Neighborhood Association is a good example of what residents can do and noted the importance of residents being involved.

Lance Place Playground

Phyllis Reid Anderson stated that she is a landlord in the area of Lance Place playground. She stated that she is involved in the Outlet Area Neighborhood Group and the Weed and Seed group. She stated that she has witnessed drug deals on Lance Place playground. She stated that she installed lights on her property to illuminate the park and they were quickly shot out. She stated that she assisted in the Great American Clean Up and Operation Facelift. She stated that families using the nearby laundromat could benefit greatly from improving the playground to allow these families a fun place to go while they are waiting for their laundry. She described the condition of the playground and stated that there are no swings and no benches. She requested permission to replace the items.

Mr. Geffken stated that he has requested that Mr. Jones develop a standard agreement for groups to perform maintenance at parks and playgrounds. He stated that once this agreement is developed many can begin to assist.

Mr. Denbowski stated that the City completed a \$100,000 project at this playground approximately five years ago and the playground was ruined within a year.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested that the agreement be developed so that projects can move forward.

Mr. Sterner noted the continuing problem with vandalism at this playground. He stated that he requested a streetlight in this area but that project has not moved forward.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz informed the Committee that Weed and Seed recently learned that

they will no longer receive State funding.

Mr. Sterner suggested that the City purchase the equipment needed at Lance Place and the community install it. Mr. Denbowski stated that the equipment cannot be installed until the safety surface is repaired. He stated that this is a large expense and noted the need for assistance in keeping the vandalism down at this playground.

Mr. Lubas arrived at this time.

Angelica Park Lease Agreement

Mr. Lubas stated that Alvernia's season did not end until Memorial Day weekend. He stated that there is an issue behind home plate which needs to be addressed and the field has been reseeded. He stated that he had two games scheduled in June which he has rescheduled until July. He stated that if the City uses the field during Alvernia's off season they must repair any damage. He stated that the two games per day limit is not in the formal agreement but if too much damage is done the City cannot make the necessary repairs. He stated that Alvernia does all maintenance at these fields.

Mr. Marmarou noted the problems teams have in finding fields to play. Mr. Lubas stated that he has spoken with the two teams.

Mr. Marmarou questioned who received the fees to use these fields. Mr. Lubas stated that Alvernia gets the majority of the fee as they perform the work. He stated that the City gets a portion of the fee for his time in working with the teams.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned who received the payment. Mr. Lubas explained that Alvernia and the City send separate invoices. The City receives \$20 per game at Angelica Park.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for consistency in leases for ball fields.

Mr. Marmarou expressed his belief that the cost of field rentals is pricing some clubs out and forcing them to close.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the Recreation Commission must look at the costs incurred by groups to use City facilities. They must also consider the age and maintenance needs of all City facilities. She stated that they will have much work to do.

Street Paving Projects

Mr. Geffken stated that the N. Front Street repaving project is proceeding.

Ms. Hoag distributed a list of possible projects.

Mr. Geffken stated that \$300,000 of the \$450,000 unprogrammed CD funds will be used for paving projects. Ms. Hoag stated that some streets on the proposed list may not qualify for CDBG funding.

Mr. Sterner suggested that the list be examined for qualification first and then be prioritized. Mr. Geffken agreed.

Mr. Sterner requested that this list then be reviewed at the next Public Works Committee meeting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed stating that the list should also be reviewed during a Committee of the Whole session. She questioned the progress on repaving Cotton St. She stated that UGI will be repaving one side of the street and requested that the City repave the other. Mr. Geffken stated that he has spoken with UGI about the meters but not the paving project.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that it is not practical to repave one side of Cotton St. Ms. Hoag agreed stating that this is a heavily used street in East Reading.

Traffic Issues

- Removal of Multiple Crosswalks at College Ave & Bern St (Albright)

Mr. Geffken reported that he, the Police Chief and Public Works Director met with Albright about these crosswalks. He stated that Albright has agreed to the plan proposed by the City and stated that the City will perform all required painting.

Ms. Hoag reviewed the proposed plan. Mr. Geffken stated that Albright will fund the handicap ramp portion of this project.

Mr. Marmarou noted his agreement with the proposed plan but he questioned the continued use of the temporary pedestrian signs. He stated that Albright should be placing the signs out in the morning and removing them in the evening.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz suggested a formal request be sent to Albright in writing.

Mr. Marmarou suggested that this letter be sent to all who use these signs.

Ms. Katzenmoyer questioned if the Committee was ready to move the ordinance approving the stop sign at 13th & Richmond Sts out of the pending legislation. The Committee stated that the ordinance could be moved out of pending for action at the June 27 regular meeting.

- Request for Traffic Signal at S 5th & Bingaman Sts

Mr. Geffken stated that \$45,000 of the unprogrammed CD funds will be used to install a signal at 5th and Bingaman Sts.

Ms. Hoag clarified that it is a flashing warning device.

Automated Red Light Enforcement Transportation Enhancement Grant Program

This grant is for the installation of cameras that photograph cars going through red lights so that they can be cited.

Mr. Geffken stated that he reviewed the information from Ms. Kelleher. He stated that he will continue to review the information with Mr. Jones.

Cutting/Trimming Grass and Weeds at City Property

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that the City has been issuing Quality of Life tickets to residents who do not mow their grass but that is inconsistent with the way the City mows its grass. Mr. Geffken stated that it was a very rainy spring which has caused the grass to grow more quickly than the limited staff can mow. He stated that he has been working with Mr. Jones and Mr. Zeiber to load properties which need City maintenance into the GIS system to allow better planning of personnel. He stated that the summer employees will begin June 24.

Mr. Marmarou expressed his belief that the City is doing a great job with the Quality of Life tickets but noted the need for consistency. Mr. Geffken noted that the staff has been decreased and the increased amount of rain has made cutting difficult. He stated that Quality of Life enforcement and education are going well and that it is a good program. He noted that change is always difficult and that the appeal process is available to residents. He stated that a flyer will be in an upcoming water bill to continue the educational component.

Mr. Denbowski stated that an additional flyer is being developed regarding proper trash disposal and the need to keep neighborhoods clean. He stated that public service announcements will also air on BCTV and local radio stations.

Mr. Geffken noted his understanding of Council's concern for education in addition to tickets but stated that imposition of a penalty can also implement change and improve the City.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the need for some residents to change their norms.

Mr. Marmarou noted a problem with the 1700 block of Mineral Spring Road. He stated that the sidewalk on the upper side is impassable due to trees and weeds. He noted that this is a City gateway and should be better maintained.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this block received Quality of Life tickets and there has been some improvement.

Mr. Sterner expressed his belief that for some people enforcement is the best education.

Bandshell

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she reviewed the list of maintenance items needed to be addressed before the concert series begins. Mr. Geffken stated that these items are being addressed. He stated that the Berks Arts Council does not pay to use the bandshell and suggested that they volunteer to make some improvements.

Mr. Marmarou stated that a collection is taken at concerts. He suggested that a second collection be made for donations to the City to help offset costs.

Ordinance Regulating Utilities in City Streets

Ms. Hoag stated that there are several utilities in the right of way public road area. She stated that some of these utilities are installed very near the surface causing problems with maintenance. She stated that Public Works is researching regulations on what utilities can be installed in the public road area and that some utilities are installed so close to the surface that milling and repaving has been complicated. She stated that many utilities do not give the City copies of installations so there is no way to know where utilities are located. She noted the need to work better with the utilities to pre-plan projects where the City will be repaving. She stated that many contractors do not apply for cutting permits and explained that all these problems cause additional problems with sewer repairs as the sewer lines are the lowest depth. She suggested that street cut fees cover the City's costs and noted that the mistakes of others cost the City.

Mr. Sterner expressed his disbelief and noted that he believed that utility installation was better regulated. Ms. Hoag stated that the City's regulations are very old and have not been updated.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned the timeline for the ordinance. Ms. Hoag noted that she did not have a timeline as regulations cannot be retroactive and some critical functions will be affected by the new regulations.

Mr. Sterner questioned the regulations used by other cities. Ms. Hoag stated that she has not begun that portion of the research.

Mr. Marmarou noted the need for this ordinance to also address those installing curb cuts and driveways without permits.

Mr. Geffken suggested that Ms. Kelleher assist in the research of the regulations of other cities.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested monthly updates on this topic to ensure forward progress.

Mr. Sterner stated that utility companies know where their lines are and suggested sharing

mapping information. Ms. Hoag stated that not all companies use the same system and there are different benchmarks that make map sharing difficult.

Peace Sign (Continued)

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that the individuals interested in refurbishing the sign have not arrived. She stated that if the sign were repainted it would no longer be visible due to tree growth. Mr. Geffken stated that removing trees would cause problems with water run off and other environmental issues not present in the past.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed and noted that the trail to the peace sign would be very inaccessible to equipment to remove the trees.

Recreation Commission Update

Mr. Denbowski stated that the work group will be meeting tomorrow to continue discussions. He stated that the main topic of this meeting will be to finalize the School District's financial contribution to the Commission. He stated that the agreement will soon be before Council for their consideration.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz explained that recreation employees will change status and become employees of the Commission.

Mr. Sterner questioned if the agreement was only between the City and the School District. Mr. Denbowski explained that it is an inter-governmental agreement between these two parties only. He noted his hope that Council approves the agreement in August.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that after the agreement is signed the recreation funding cannot be cut during the budget process as the amount budgeted now will be the amount in the agreement.

Mr. Sterner stated that the budget will decrease as the City will no longer be paying the personnel costs of the recreation employees. Mr. Denbowski explained that the agreement will be for a five year period. The City will make quarterly payments to the Recreation Commission to cover expenses.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz explained that rental fees will remain with the Recreation Commission. Mr. Denbowski clarified that this amount will be approximately \$100,000 annually.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that this will ensure that rentals will continue to support the work of the Recreation Commission.

Other Discussion

- UGI

Mr. Geffken stated that he has met with UGI representatives to ensure that a situation similar to the explosion in Allentown does not occur in Reading. He stated that he voiced his concerns regarding Cotton St at this meeting.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she has walked into the new meters as they protrude into the sidewalk right of way area. She stated that she has spoken with Representative Caltagirone about this. She noted the importance of UGI attending a public meeting to answer resident questions. She stated that sidewalk repairs have begun.

There was a brief discussion regarding the dangers of the meters being struck during an auto accident or by fireworks.

- New sign on the Geigle Complex at RHS

Mr. Marmarou stated that this sign was installed in April at a cost of \$30,000 to the district. He questioned if they received a permit for the installation as it is a large illuminated sign. Mr. Geffken stated that he was unaware if they received a permit.

- Pagoda

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz reported that the Pagoda Foundation has been approved for corporate status and will be applying for 501 (C) 3 designation. She stated that the Public Works Committee will be reviewing a lease agreement between the City and the Pagoda Foundation.

- Library

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz granted permission to Mr. Schlegel to ask a question.

Mr. Schlegel stated that the City has entered into an electric contract for all City buildings including the libraries. He requested that the library buildings be removed as electricity can be purchased at a more reasonable price elsewhere. Ms. Hoag explained that the City did not initiate this agreement but that it must remain in effect until the end of 2011.

The Public Works Committee adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Katzenmoyer, Deputy City Clerk